

**BRINGING BACK SHAKESPEARE:  
AN EXPERIMENT  
IN CHALLENGING MODERN AUDIENCES  
USING ORIGINAL STAGING TECHNIQUES**

by

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All quotations from Shakespeare plays other than *The Tempest*, come from the *Oxford Complete Works of Shakespeare*, Second Edition. All quotations from *The Tempest* come from the Arden Revised edition of *The Tempest* (2013), both of which can be found in the references section at the end of this text.

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the “original staging” movement has gained momentum as a surprisingly effective technique to Shakespearean performance. Recently, at least a half-dozen theatres in the United States and the UK have devoted their repertoires to replicating the techniques with which Shakespeare’s plays were actually staged in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They theorize that performing Shakespeare the way Shakespeare might have done it creates more enriching and enjoyable productions for modern audiences. In the following work I will describe my attempt at creating a new original staging production using a small, modestly funded student company on a university campus, including the month of preparation and the ultimate success of 6 total performances of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, which were performed at UD in late March. The overwhelming prevalence of positive feedback that was received about the production (from audience members and company members alike) backs up the findings of the other “original staging” companies around the world – that this type of performance is entertaining, appealing, and highly effective in reaching modern audiences. Uniquely, however, we also proved that smaller, less-funded companies can find routes into the original practices movement, and we could perhaps expect to see dozens more original practice productions – if not, devoted companies – in the theatrical world over the next few years.

## INTRODUCTION

It used to be that the only productions of Shakespeare that gained widespread acclaim were those that took a formal, classically trained approach to the Bard. These companies have been inspired by the great success of theatres like the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Old Vic Theatre in London, theatres that have performed an almost endless number of Shakespeare productions throughout the twentieth century and given rise to highly respected “Shakespearean” actors like Sir John Gielgud, Sir Laurence Olivier, and Dame Judi Dench. For years these companies have relied on techniques of realism, sparing no expense on scenery, costumes, effects, stage combat, and most importantly language training. Actors there spend years studying Shakespearean texts, creating a so-called expert reading of the meter, symbolism, and meaning behind the words on the paper. The resulting productions are usually lengthy feasts for the eyes and ears, and they are often pricy and win many accolades and awards among the theatre community. They become marked as the “traditional” or “professional” style, and they have remained so for many companies for years, and they continue to inspire many current productions, including a recent production of *Hamlet* at the UD Resident Ensemble Players, which employed all of these techniques and won particular attention among local critics for its lavish set and costumes and its intensely realistic and emotional portrayals of the tragic characters.

Yet recently other types of Shakespearean productions have gained esteem the world over. Outdoor productions in particular have become increasingly popular over the last decade or so. “Shakespeare in the Park” attracts thousands of visitors to the

Big Apple every summer, and many other cities around the world engage in similar projects like the Dublin Shakespeare Festival, a group of students out of Trinity College Dublin who have performed dozens of Shakespeare and Shakespeare-related mini-productions all over the southern half of Dublin for the past few summers. And these projects are not limited to urban metropolis; almost every local community has a summer outdoor Shakespeare company, including our small Northern Delaware community with its popular Delaware Shakespeare Festival. These productions often advertise a “family-friendly” feel, and offer carnival-like attractions like concession stands, family events, prize drawings, and supplemental performances by musicians, comedians, and even by actors within the companies.

Some devoted thespians have even turned to parody over the last decade or so to help popularize Shakespeare. The immensely popular show *The Complete Works of Shakespeare [Abridged]* written and performed by the Reduced Shakespeare Company takes a fast-paced, nothing-is-sacred approach to Shakespeare, performing as they say “all 37 plays in 90 minutes.” This show features gimmicks such as turning the history plays into a football game, turning *Othello* into a rap, and performing a version of *Hamlet* both forwards, backwards, and ten times fast. These and other comical adaptations of Shakespeare are becoming especially popular among young adults and children, providing field trip and student theatre opportunities for students who often have never been interested in Shakespeare before. And the appeals are certainly there for those who are familiar with Shakespeare as well, albeit differently; the show breaks down each of the plays to very simple synopses, emphasizing the huge extent to which major overarching themes overlap in Shakespeare’s works, contributing to our understanding of them as a connected body of work. Of course it



also provides us Shakespeare “junkies” with some laughs as well, accentuating to a great extent the raunchy and fast-paced humor that Shakespeare himself used to amuse his countrymen.

Then in recent years the “original staging” or “original practices” movement has gained momentum as a surprisingly effective technique to Shakespearean performance. At least a half-dozen companies in the US and Britain have focused solely on these techniques, the iconic example being the New Globe in London but many more have performed one or more performances in this style as part of a growing recognition of this technique throughout Shakespearean studies. This movement relies heavily on research about Shakespeare’s company; they rely on what little material we have about firsthand experiences from early modern theatregoers, and the great deal of material we have about the structures of the playhouses themselves. Most dedicated “original practice” companies even have full-scale replicas of early modern theatres, or have similar backstage features as Shakespeare’s theatres would have had. The performance techniques of these companies, which will be discussed at length in the early part of this work, vary on the same themes: interactivity and engagement with the audience, early modern casting techniques, and the use of music, dancing, and human-driven effects and spectacle to create fast-paced, engaging, and highly active Shakespeare.

Thus in these modern theatrical times we are flooded with the combined performance styles of the last five hundred years or so. There are especially numerous methods now available to perform and experience Shakespeare, who is still revered by both modern theatre-makers and theatregoers alike as the English language’s single greatest poet. We throw around many words to describe the styles we employ to honor

the Bard: “classical,” “traditional,” “family-friendly,” “experimental,” or “authentic.” But the so-called “authentic” way to perform Shakespeare in our modern theatrical age is both a reality and a myth; we no longer bow down before the classically trained actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company in London. We flock to new and inventive productions like *Sleep No More*, which is in its third year performing an interactive version of *Macbeth* out of a hotel in New York. Rather the “authentic” way to perform Shakespeare is redefined by every company, who each define “authentic” based on their individual successes in performing Shakespeare in their unique style.

But when an original practices company in particular defines “authentic” performance they mean it in a different sense of the word than most. Rather than suggesting an authoritative or a superior technique for performing Shakespeare, original practice companies use the literal sense of the word, implying that their techniques are very close to the techniques of Shakespeare’s own company. Few, if any, of these companies claim that original practices is the definitive best method, yet the remarkable feedback they have received from audience members over the last couple of years and the growing attendance rates at their productions tend to make us wonder if there is something significant in the whole “authentic” Shakespeare idea. Where else could this be tried? To what extent can we truly replicate Shakespeare, and what resources does one need to be involved in such an undertaking? If one company decided to bring original staging practices to the general theatregoing (and for that matter, NOT theatregoing) student body at the University of Delaware, what would change? These questions inspired the theatrical experiment outlined in this work, and our months of work in answering them found that there may indeed be something to this “authentic” Shakespeare notion of which the Bard himself might just approve.

## Chapter 1

### RESEARCH: LEARNING FROM SHAKESPEARE HIMSELF

In much of the current literature that is available about the original staging techniques and audience environment from Shakespeare's time one term repeatedly appears: "active." Scholars provide a variety of information about the conditions of early modern theatres, much of which is self-admitted speculation, inferred from close reading of playscripts. Yet if there is one quality of the early modern theatre that it seems we all can agree on, it is the "active" quality of the interaction between actor and audience. As Andrew Gurr writes early in the introduction to his book *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, "Shakespearean receivers were far from passive objects...they are the most inconstant, elusive, unfixed element of the Shakespearean performance text" (Gurr, "Playgoing" 3). The physicality of the viewing experience, of the acting techniques, and even of the theatre spaces themselves – many of which could literally shift under the feet of groundlings as rain poured through the open roofs and soaked the dirt beneath them – allow us to infer a high level of variability existed from day to day and from moment to moment.

This active, amorphous quality of the original Shakespearean environment is that which is most foreign to our modern theatergoer. Modern theatrical audiences have been largely influenced by the introduction of the cinema in the early twentieth century, so nowadays it is hard to distinguish between the seating layouts of a traditional play theatre and a movie theatre. More and more theatrical spaces are emerging as one-level, black box theatres, designed with the maximum comfort of the

viewer in mind and paying the sternest attention to maintaining the verisimilitude of the action on stage. Lighting and sound technicians are cleverly hidden to preserve the magic, and aisles and entryways are kept where they will be the least obtrusive to the patron's experience. Audiences and actors alike place as tantamount the Modernist idea of maintaining the "fourth wall," and go to the theatre for the experience of watching a slice of real life. The goal of the typical twenty-first century patron at a movie or a play is to forget one is at the theatre, being enthralled only with the action in front of them, and believing it to be real.

The audience plays their part too; the spectators observe certain conventions that serve to reinforce and further pigeonhole them into their passive roles. They refuse to draw attention to their presence, and common acting training even includes the notion that an actor must not speak "over" a laugh, because their audiences are so housebroken that they will literally quiet themselves so as to not risk further disturbing the flow of the dialogue. This training is so universal that live television audiences – who are actually *expected* to make noise during the performance – have to be instructed by neon signs that tell them when to "applaud," "laugh," and moon over particularly tender moments. Shakespeare's audiences by contrast did not need such explicit instructions. As will be described in more detail later in this chapter, theatregoers of the late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean ages expressed both their pleasure and their displeasure audibly and quite freely, and it is their contributions to performance that are the missing link in our constant quest to recapture the original magic of Shakespearean performances.

The conditions of staging and audience behavior are largely influenced by the physical space of the theatres themselves, which were numerous and varied during the

fifty-two years of Shakespeare's life between 1564 and 1616. Although Shakespeare likely acted and wrote for many playhouses throughout his career, when examining the specific theatres of Shakespeare's company, one can safely narrow the focus to comparing the old Globe and the second Blackfriars Playhouse. Of the two, the former was a typical open-air gallery theatre, while the latter was an example of the more modern indoor theatre that came into popularity during the later part of Shakespeare's career, and for which many of his later plays were written. Generally the open-air theatres, or amphitheatres, were characterized by a round architecture containing several levels of galleries, these features often being leftover from the venues being used as animal-baiting rings or public inns. The galleries and the stage platform were both roofed, the latter of which extended out from one wall of the circular structure. But the area where the "groundlings" stood, offered no seating and no shelter ("Playgoing" 15). Some have argued that this contributed to the active, involved attitudes of the patrons, who could not easily be tamed or fooled as "part of a noisy crowd in an uncomfortable open-air playhouse" (Gurr & Ichikawa 3).

The Blackfriars Playhouse and other indoor theatres that developed during the latter half of Shakespeare's career were very different environments from the open-air theatres, and they may have provided a more natural precursor to the modern theatres to which we are accustomed. These playhouses admittedly allowed audiences to be more passive, and certainly more physically comfortable. However, they still were born out of the loud participatory environment of the "public" playhouses, and as the same companies often went back and forth between the indoor and outdoor venues (usually in winter and summer, respectively), they would have used many of the same performance techniques and would have elicited the same reactions from audience

members. “Suggestion” and “illusion” by way of the text still trumped any available technology, and although the indoor theatres were artificially lit, Shakespeare’s actors would have still relied on “dialogue, torches, nightgowns...to establish the illusion of darkness” (Dessen 75). They would not have extinguished the theatre lights to create a variable lighting environment, even though technically they now could.

This meant audiences were still quite connected to actors’ intentions even in the indoor theatres, and music began to come to the forefront of the dramatic presentation. Productions began even more to include lively shows of song and dance that purposely interrupted the action. In fact, in her critical biography *The Life of William Shakespeare*, Lois Potter suggests that some of the earlier plays (given that only a few were written specifically for the Blackfriars), may have been adapted “to make more use of the theater’s resources, especially its musicians” (Potter 361). E.K. Chambers tells us that inter-act performances of singing and dancing were “more universal and longer” in these later venues (Chambers 130). Andrew Gurr confirms this in his much later book, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, and says that these brief musical numbers were expected to last little more than a minute and were one of the most significant differences between open-air playhouses (where there were no intervals of any kind) and indoor playhouses such as the Blackfriars (Gurr, “Shakespearean Stage” 218).

After close examination of the physical environments in which Shakespeare’s audiences would have stood, scholars have subsequently zeroed in on the techniques of staging the plays, like this tradition of inter-act music, in the hopes that understanding and replicating the staging and acting techniques of the Chamberlain’s Men will further inform our inferences about what the expected audience reactions to

the performances would have been. Although Shakespearean playscripts do not include much in the way of stage directions, scholars can still find out about early modern staging by close-reading the texts, and they find clues in the way characters enter, exit, and speak. Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa have done an exhaustive study of Shakespearean stage acting based solely on the entrance and exit timings that are indicated by the speech of other characters. In their book, they presented the argument that based on the time an actor was given to exit and re-enter, one of the two stage doors was a designated “entrance” door and the other was an “exit” door, and gave a thorough argument about how this convention would be followed or flouted based on the amount of lines that surrounded a particular action. They even broke down in a scientific manner the amount of time it would take to travel and complete certain actions on stage based on the amount of lines that took place prior to and during that action (Gurr & Ichikawa 114).

We can even use given and inferred stage directions to better support the close connection that actors had with audiences. At the 2013 Blackfriars Conference at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia, an entire workshop was devoted to the different ways actors could communicate with audiences within the same dialogue. In many cases, this is suggested by metatheatrical references in the text, which seem to directly allude to the environment in which they stood, hence the commonly quoted allusion “this distracted Globe” from *Hamlet* (1.5.97). The ASC asserts there can be as many as four different methods of directly referring to the live audience within the already present text, which they coin as followed: “casting” them, or indicating them when directly referring to unseen characters in the play; “allying” with them, by playing lines in which a character explains or defends their actions

directly to the audience as if allowing them to judge and respond; “seeking information,” which allows the actor to propose direct questions to audience members (in many cases risking an audience member providing them with an answer); and finally, they could make the audience the “object,” especially during crowd metaphors as with Marc Antony’s famed speech to “Friends, Romans, countrymen” in Julius Caesar (3.2.74). Not to mention the stage direction *Aside* which has long been understood by Shakespeare scholars to suggest not a remark of self-reflection but a moment of confederacy between the character speaking and the audience to which any other characters on stage are not privy.

We also know a fair amount about the visual aspects of Elizabethan staging from the prop and costume inventories alluded to or directly accounted for in both the texts of the plays and the official documents of the theatre companies. Philip Henslowe, theatre manager of Shakespeare’s company, kept detailed records now referred to as “Henslowe’s Diary” in which he inventories many of the costumes and properties regularly used in the plays of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, including the plays of Shakespeare. We know that most props were portable to allow for easy transport to courts and country theatres during the off-season or during the closures of the London playhouses during the plague years. Even the largest props referred to in the plays – heavy thrones and beds among them – were often produced on the fly, as “they could be constructed or introduced if one was thought to be an essential feature” (Gurr & Ichikawa 57). No sets or other location-defining objects were built, as their use would be short-lived between the performance of one play one afternoon and the performance of a completely different play on the next. Costumes were expensive, numerous and incredibly important to the storytelling. But



as to large fixtures that would these days be required for other bits of stage business – places to hide, for example – all evidence suggests that the companies adapted to the theatre space in which they were playing, using the built in pillars to hide behind while eavesdropping on other characters (59).

But perhaps the most important thing we know about the staging of early modern plays that made the experience of watching them so unique was the daily variability. It is a common epithet in the twenty-first century theatre that plays are more exciting than movies or television because “anything can happen” and they can change every night, but this is a wild exaggeration compared to the amount of variation that an early modern playgoer would have experienced from night to night. As Gurr and Ichikawa write, “Companies altered their performances day by day, changing the staging according to which kinds of resource that day’s venue provided” (44). They even suggest that players had the liberty of deciding that pieces of stage action “could be improved” and would cut the script freely to accommodate for time or as a reaction to that which “had not worked well in the previous performance.” As Gurr writes in *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, “Plays were subject to constant change, not just in the memory but in such transient features of the performance event as the mood of the audience and the condition of the day” (209).

Furthermore, adjustments were often required in performance because of the limited rehearsal time early modern companies were allotted, especially when compared with the generous rehearsal opportunities of our modern theatres. Andrew Gurr’s research has indicated there was as little as three weeks between the completion of a written play and the premiere, and with the company’s hectic repertory schedule they “cannot have had much free time for rehearsal of its new plays” (*Shakespearean*

*Stage* 254). He argues that based on this schedule no substantial efforts would have been made to “polish” the plays until after they had premiered and received a favorable response. Once that happened, this “polishing” could include further cuts to the text, accommodation for casting changes in the company, and even extensions of popular moments. John Astington writes that comic episodes that received positive audience attention may have “varied from performance to performance; the more the merriments were applauded, the more elaborated or extended they might have become” (123). These decisions by the players were as much a part of developing a play as the writing was – “the creation of a play was a collaborative process, with the author by no means at the center” (Dessen 24). Our understanding of this collaborative, trial-and-error process makes us more appreciative of the multiple surviving versions of Shakespeare plays – they may preserve for us some of the changes that were made, even though we no longer have the audiences who inspired those changes.

From all of these contributing factors we can assemble a rough picture of what the plays looked and sounded like for an audience member. This, however, still leaves us looking for exact references to how the audience felt and reacted while watching the plays. We know precious little from audience members themselves, but from a collection of anecdotes we can piece together an idea of how audiences behaved in response to the actions on stage and the environments in which they stood. We can actually learn the most about audience psychology and behavior by finding examples of strong negative reactions. Modern audiences are taught to be polite and quiet, even when a production is clearly flawed or just plain displeasing or offensive. When this happened in the early modern theatre, however, it could become a “legendary

theatrical disaster,” as with Shakespeare contemporary Ben Jonson’s premiere performance of *Sejanus*, which was characterized by a violently angry crowd response that quite possibly included booing or hissing the actors off the stage (Potter 307).

While we have already established that these qualities of the early modern theatre are far removed from the behaviors of modern theatregoers, they are not altogether removed from all present-day spectators. Twenty-first century entertainments are many, and they do not always fall into the realm of stage art, and when we delve without those limits we find other entertainment forms that return us to the original interactive audience of Shakespeare. Many original staging experts, including Artistic Director Jeff Watkins of the New American Shakespeare Tavern in Atlanta, have drawn parallels between the original actor-spectator relationship and street performance. In his essay “A Personal Perspective on Original Practice in American Shakespeare” he talks about how performing in that way makes one feel closer to Shakespeare, and how “the art of magic and the art of theater each depend upon a process of shared revelation.” He continues by saying, “the lean years of my career when I actually fed myself by doing magic tricks on big-city streets for total strangers have led me to embrace an approach to Shakespeare's plays that is radically different.”

But perhaps for the closest spectator experience akin to that of an early modern playgoer we must look at the twenty-first century sports culture. Sports fans of every kind in our society line up to watch drama, even if they do not exactly refer to it by that name. Viewers no matter the sport eat, cheer, and chant during a game, taking sides and deciding when a particular action (a particular “call” by the referee or a “play” by the coach) was not the right choice. All of these are the qualities that we

have been tracking down in our research about early modern playgoers. Lois Potter even confirms in her critical biography of Shakespeare, “habitual theatregoers behaved like sports fans discussing the respective merits of two players” and “younger spectators seem to have felt licensed to behave as wildly as they liked” (153-157). Thus, we may be closer to defining this mystery audience than we would first believe. If we take what we have learned about them through all of this careful research and take a chance on applying it to a real theatrical event, we may be able to join the ranks of those theatres that are currently trying to bring that audience back.

## **Chapter 2**

### **GOALS: ADAPTING TO A MODERN COMPANY**

According to the American Shakespeare Center there are four general principles that modern theatres focus on when they try to recreate these staging conditions and insert them into their twenty-first century repertory. Although clearly there are many aspects of the early modern theatre that differ from that of our own, these original practices theatres focus on only a few techniques, and high on the list are close physical replicas of early modern playhouses. Notable examples of this are the “new” Globe Theatre in London and the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Virginia, both of which are structurally modeled on the original Shakespearean playhouses after which they are named. They also try to rehearse and perform in a technique they call “universal lighting,” which on one hand means they do not employ any lighting effects or variability during the play itself. On the other hand this also means that there is little to no lighting difference between the actors and the audience, a much more valuable quality for this type of theatre. Through universal lighting the audience is not visually closed off from the actors at all – the actors can see and react to everything they see in the audience, including (and especially) their reactions to the performance.

While the first two priorities of these companies deal with the physical conditions of the theatre itself, the latter two deal specifically with the performance techniques of Shakespeare’s company members themselves. The actors and plays of Shakespeare’s careers were, for one, highly musical and interconnected. Actors were

usually double-cast, utilized for multiple roles in almost every play, and their performances relied heavily on their musical ability. William Kemp, a famous member of the Chamberlain's Men most commonly associated with clown roles was known for performing jigs (even having one named after him), and he bequeathed a number of personal musical instruments in his will, proving on both accounts that he was quite an adept musician (Potter 139).

The final quality and perhaps the most difficult one that original staging companies attempt to replicate is the repertory schedule of the Chamberlain's Men and their contemporaries. Andrew Gurr writes that in one particular year Shakespeare's company performed as many as thirty-eight plays in a single season, and they likely performed at least six different plays each week (*Shakespearean Stage* 124). Modern acting and rehearsal practices along with union regulations by Actors' Equity Association companies would make replicating this schedule impossible today. However, some original staging companies including the ASC have attempted to create a reasonable simulation of this by performing multiple plays per week during each season with several different seasons throughout the year. In 2013 the new Globe in London performed about eighteen plays, the ASC in Virginia performed sixteen, and the New American Shakespeare Tavern in Atlanta, Georgia performed close to ten, many of which were performed in repertory style split over two or three seasons.

It is possible to compile this research and experience into a formulaic guide for creating an original staging production of one's own, using a student company and locations on the University of Delaware campus. Obviously there are numerous challenges to doing an original staging production, even for these established theatres for whom it is their everyday business. This is perhaps why the ASC specifies only

four areas of highest interest in their work, and for our project we will focus on the first three areas, along with other aspects of the original Shakespearean acting and performance environment that have been revealed through research. It is notable, though, that for our student production, for which the experimental parameters will be outlined in great detail below, we will not be attempting to perform a traditional rotating repertory schedule. That is to say, we will be performing one play, *The Tempest*, but we will attempt to perform on the more rigorous schedule of nightly performances rather than a traditional weekend schedule.

We can consider this early research into Shakespeare's company and the modern companies that imitate it as background fodder for further experimentation. But in order to consider this a true scientific, or in this case theatrical, experiment we must begin with a hypothesis. In this case, we hypothesize that if we practice a number of the elements we have learned about early modern staging, and we include techniques that are meant to encourage early modern audience behavior, we can create a reasonable simulation of an early modern performance. In addition, by creating this simulation of Shakespeare as Shakespeare intended, we can create a more meaningful or more effective production of Shakespeare for a modern audience.

### **Physical Stage Conditions**

Our particular company is not at leisure to create a full-scale replica of a Shakespearean playhouse. The Blackfriars Playhouse, where *The Tempest* would have been originally staged, contained a very recognizable stage space; it had a flat stage, one large "discovery" entrance in the center of the upstage wall covered by drapery, and two doorways on either side of the discovery space. The Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Virginia features a close replica of this stage. In their book on *Staging in*

*Shakespeare's Theatres*, Gurr and Ichikawa argue the significance of this stage layout in considering staging techniques. They provide textual evidence of the amount of lines surrounding a character's exit or re-entrance and make inferences about the amount of time it would take for a backstage cross in the Blackfriars theatre. They also provide textual evidence about when and how the discovery space in the center of the stage would be used, for example, in *The Tempest* when Ferdinand and Miranda are "discovered playing at chess" (5.1.172).

Traditional theatre spaces are not built with these upstage discovery spaces, although often they are still built with left and right backstage doors. However the houses of these theatres are not often built with the original Shakespearean audience in mind. While early modern audiences stood or sat on level wooden benches in galleries or in three-quarter-round stalls, modern audiences are given plushy seats in blocks of seats in auditorium theatres. Seats are designed for maximum comfort for the audience member, with armrests and enough room for people to be separated from one another. It encourages passivity – the audience members are not forced to interact, even physically. By contrast, Shakespeare's audiences would have moved constantly, shifting and communicating throughout the action of the play.

In light of this, our company decided to opt for non-traditional theatre spaces. We wanted performance locations that would allow audiences to stand, crowd, and move freely. We also wanted to perform in large public spaces, inspired by Shakespeare's traveling performances in the country and also by the marketplace theatres that even pre-date Shakespeare, where the performances attracted passers-by. Both of these we felt could be achieved by performing in public university eating areas, including two separate food courts and one residential dining facility. For at



least one other performance, we also intended to perform in a large lecture hall. This varied assortment of spaces would also provide the ideal of maximum variability in performance, as will be discussed later. Even for plays which we know were staged for a particular Early modern theatre (like *The Tempest* at the Blackfriars), we also know the plays would likely have been repeatedly performed at different spaces as well – opting to perform in the open-air playhouses in summer, performing in the country during plague closures, and performing at court during holiday seasons. The companies also often rotated the plays through other theatres than the ones where they began, so the performers knew that the play had to be readily adjustable for any type of theatre space. We did hope to keep one traditional theatre space as a type of “experimental control.”

### **Music**

*The Tempest*, except for the possible exception of *As You Like It*, is Shakespeare’s most musical play. At least four different characters sing during the course of the play, in at least a dozen instances throughout. Ariel especially, whom the Arden Shakespeare text stipulates must have been a very talented musician, sings, dances, and is explicitly directed to play a “tabor and pipe” in Act 3, Scene 2, and it is impossible to say if these were the only instruments he would have been expected to play. Additionally, the masque-like scene in Act 4, Scene 1, if indeed it was based on the traditional court masque, would have involved many more members of the ensemble musically. Of course, all music would have been live, lacking the technology for any kind of pre-recorded music or sound.

In our production we decided to place a high emphasis on the musicality of the scenes themselves. Despite extensive cuts to the script, intended to leave us with a

running time of around ninety minutes, we cut no original instances of music. In fact, we *added* at least three musical numbers not present in the original script. There is one main difference, though, between the performances in our production and those in Shakespeare's. Our cast was not selected or cast specifically for their musical ability with the exception of the role of Ariel, for which we specifically selected a student with impressive vocal abilities. As for the rest, the musical director and myself decided that once the play was cast we would assess their present abilities (along with our own) to create a well-rehearsed musical production within our short time frame, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3. This technique of musical arrangement led us in search of many easy-to-learn instruments, beginning with an Irish tin whistle, a harmonica, a ukulele, a tambourine, a small hand drum, bells, whistles, and that many-varied instrument of the human voice. Wherever possible, we planned to adhere to the original stage directions for music – for example, during the instance of “tabor and pipe” (3.2.126) we planned to accompany the singer's voice with similar instruments to the ones indicated.

Given the time constraints, the tunes themselves would not be originally composed for this production. Although two pieces of music actually survive from the original production of *The Tempest*, the musical notations are so foreign to modern musicians that they present somewhat of a challenge to musical directors and singers alike. In our production instead, in the interests of time and musical resources available, we would choose pre-existing songs transposed with Shakespeare's lyrics. Without much of a guide as to what the music of the whole play would have sounded like, we planned to include a number of different styles of music, including Caribbean, Hawaiian, Irish, and tribal music, traditional Christian hymns and even children's

songs. For one scene in particular, Act 3 Scene 3, we even planned to attempt an assortment of noises and musical tones as opposed to any previously composed song to create the “solemn and strange” ambience as indicated in the script (3.3).

In addition to the music within the scenes, in our production we are attempting to recreate something that was common practice for both Shakespeare’s theatres and remains so for many of the original staging companies: the inter-act music mentioned in the previous chapter. We know that Early modern audiences were accustomed to seeing plays without intervals or intermissions of any kind, and it is widely known that the term “act” itself is not always an appropriate term for the separations within Shakespeare plays, as act breaks have almost always been added by later editors. Nevertheless the action of the plays was indeed interrupted from time to time, especially in the later playhouses, with short performances of music as previously described. Since modern audiences are much more accustomed to breaks in the action, we cut our play to a within an hour and a half, but we wanted to include no intermission during this time. Instead, we planned to include one inter-act musical performance, unrelated to the play itself but featuring all of the actors singing and dancing along with all available instruments at the point where a traditional intermission would take place.

### **Casting**

When discussing casting for a Shakespeare play there inevitably arises the issue of gender. As we know, there were no women in Shakespeare’s company, and this has probably been one of the hardest things to contend with over the popularization of Shakespeare in modern theatre. Student productions especially, where females typically outnumber males almost two to one, have to rely on cross-

gender casting the opposite way, with females often playing males or roles and character names changed to add a female character to the cast. In this production, however, we are trying to recapture the audience reactions to cross-gender casting, not accommodate actors. For that reason, we believed we could create a similar effect by cross-gender casting on both sides of the gender divide. In our production, we would rely on female actresses playing men (as student companies often do), but would also require male actresses to play females. We would encourage the actors to create the illusion of the opposite gender without trying to fool the audience, actually making clear their appropriate gender to the audience. By this we hoped that the experience of watching one gender “represent” a member of the opposite sex would be rampant throughout the play.

We also know that Shakespeare’s company and the companies of their contemporaries were considerably smaller than the average cast size for a play. *Hamlet* alone features a cast of characters around twenty, while the Chamberlain’s Men traditionally featured around a dozen members, according to Lois Potter (137). Double casting as a common practice has been supported by research into early modern staging for years. In casting the play, I hoped for a small cast of around ten members who would ultimately be required to play the more than twenty characters indicated in the *dramatis personae* of *The Tempest*. This would require all characters to play multiple parts, some of which could not even be added until staging to ensure the maximum use of available bodies on stage.

### **Performance Techniques**

Yet all of these preparations would still be meant to inform one thing: recreating an early modern performance in front of an audience. The audience is the

one most elusive quality from the early modern theatre, and most definitely the most influential. Thus my focus is on recreating the audience environment as much as possible, enough so that casting, rehearsals, music, and all of the previously stated concepts serve only to inform the final product in front of a live audience. But modern audiences are not used to being active members of a performance. In Shakespeare's time the audience would have automatically behaved in a lively and reactive way because of theatrical conventions, and I have given examples of how the actors reacted and adjusted their plays in kind. Original staging companies like ours, who have to deal with the shy, well-trained audiences of the modern theatre, have to work the other way around. The burden is inevitably going to fall on the actors, who through their performance need to reestablish the theatrical norms and encourage the audience to react openly and freely to what they see on stage.

So original staging companies and researchers alike realize the necessity of encouraging active participation if it is going to be possible to replicate an early modern performance environment. Our actors will have no "fourth wall," so the audience needs to be directly involved in the action, through either direct address in the play's dialogue or by being physically involved in group actions like singing and dancing. We also have to encourage audience members to react to characters, as they would react to sports stars in a game. We know that audience members in the early modern theatre would have cheered and booed for certain moments or characters they liked or disliked and that informed the performers' on-stage decisions. While we cannot get this audience back, we can use our off-stage actors, and the attitudes of the actors on stage to try to encourage these kinds of behaviors that are so nontraditional in modern theatres.

Because of the lively audience of Shakespeare's theatres, and because of the varying locations and stage spaces discussed earlier, we know that performances then were much more variable than they are today. Audiences and performances today are much more "static," they do not change much from day to day or night to night. But original staging theatres should make it their goal to allow room for variability when preparing a production. The audience should be allowed to affect and literally change a production, as they were during Shakespeare's time. So we will know going into each performance that not all of these techniques will resonate with every audience member. Some will work very well one night, others will work very well a different night. The changing dynamics of each night's audience will hopefully allow our performances to vary, and allow us to get a clearer glimpse of the performance environment of Shakespeare's theatre.

### **Putting It All Together**

I have previously stated our hypothesis for this production, that if we recreate the audience and acting conditions of Shakespeare's theatre we can create a reasonable and highly effective simulation of an early modern performance. Although not all qualities of the original staging environment can be replicated, even by professional companies, there are certain conditions that are repeatedly upheld by these theatres. By examining our limitations as a student company acting on a private university campus, I made certain decisions about what conditions would be possible and useful to replicate, especially regarding staging, casting, and performance techniques.

Much of what was described in this chapter, though, began as largely theoretical. As with most experiments, the parameters changed once we entered our "laboratory" environment and began development our experiment. We found

contradictions and complications that required constant adjustment. These adjustments will become clear in the next chapter, which will outline our actual rehearsal process, which we will call the methods and preparation portion of our unique theatrical experiment.

## **Chapter 3**

### **PREPARATION: THE REHEARSAL PROCESS**

If this project is a theatrical experiment, it would seem as though the longest and most involved part of the process would be the experiment itself. However, as the old adage goes, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I’ll spend the first four hours sharpening the axe.” As with any play, preparations take months of hard work from dozens of people, many of whom are working on other projects simultaneously, just like our company members would be, and as excited as we may have been to jump into performances and test our theories about how to bring the Shakespearean audience back to life in our modern audiences, there was a great deal of work to do before we would even see an audience.

#### **Preparing for Rehearsals**

Casting for this production presented a particular set of challenges not present in the other plays I have directed. Our expedited process would not allow the same luxuries a company usually has when undertaking a Shakespeare play, especially a student company. There would be significantly less time to discuss language and vocal technique so actors who were already familiar with Shakespeare would have an advantage. Yet on the other hand, the experimental nature of the project also necessitated using actors with whom I already had established mutual trust. Fresh young students who are used to traditional Shakespeare productions would have to already show a great deal of confidence and trust to commit themselves to such a



unique and demanding project. Plus, I was limited substantially by the campus environment. An unpaid project for which rehearsals and performances were to take place on a private university campus (with very exclusive parking arrangements to boot) would obviously be more attractive to local students with free time than a wide range of actors from the community, despite the many enthusiastic community actors I already knew.

For all of these reasons, I opted to reach out personally to actors I knew to build our acting troupe, rather than having open-call auditions. After all, even the company members of Shakespeare himself knew what parts they would be playing when a play was written; we know many lead roles were written for Richard Burbage, many clown roles were written for William Kemp, and the female roles were written for the company's boy apprentices. I began appealing to former colleagues in October 2013, starting with several female actresses I previously directed, including Claire Davanzo (who agreed to take the role of Ariel), Arielle Klein (who agreed to take the role of Miranda), and Rebecca Deegan (who agreed to an unspecified part, later to be decided as Trinculo). I also reached out to a pair of academic acquaintances who had been involved in student theatre for several years. Although both showed an initial eagerness to fill the roles of Ferdinand and Gonzalo they were ultimately not up to the substantial commitment and they removed themselves from the project in January.

In total, I reached out to over twenty-five individual actors and friends over the months of January and February 2014. Some were eager right away to join the project, including Nigel Sanderson (Caliban) and Scott Bass (Antonio). However, I was met with hesitation by many more, and at least a dozen people declined to be a part of the project after my initial approach. As we reached February, several more agreed,

including Jason Hewett (Stephano) and Nick Johnson (Prospero). But when repeated attempts to cast Ferdinand, Gonzalo, Alonso and Sebastian failed, I began to more aggressively pursue actors, opening the field to people I had never worked with before. I sent notices to the directors and presidents at several local theatre companies, and sent out a casting call to all of the UD students with a minor in Theatre. I did not offer auditions to interested actors – instead, I opted for short, in-person interviews so that I could explain all the parameters of the project and get a personal feel for their personalities and experience. While I received a respectable selection of replies, I only conducted about three interviews, two of which had favorable outcomes. Shortly after meeting with them, I asked Megan Julian and Mary Jean Rainsford to be part of the project, filling the roles of Ferdinand and Sebastian respectively.

The intention was always to have a relatively small acting troupe, around nine or ten people. This meant that everyone I approached was informed about double-casting, cross-gender casting, the experimental approach, and the expedited rehearsal timeline. Although Shakespeare's company would have had to learn their lines during their short rehearsal period, modern theatre productions generally reserve a large portion of early rehearsals for actors to read from the scripts, learning their lines slowly. My goal was to spend very little of our limited rehearsal time in this manner during this rapid production. Thus, my goal was to cast people as early as possible and to encourage them to start learning their lines immediately, which gave an obvious advantage to those cast early on in the process.

When rehearsals were ready to begin at the end of February, we had a nearly complete cast of nine people. They made for a diverse group; the cast then had seven current UD students, including two seniors, four juniors, and one freshman. All of the

students came from different majors, including English and English Education, Music, Philosophy, Elementary Education, and Human Services. We also had two members of the community, one twenty-two year old former music student at UD, and one frequent performer at the Wilmington Drama League who was significantly older than the student cast members. We were still missing an Alonso and Gonzalo, but since we still had no interested parties as of the first rehearsal I continued searching while we progressed onto other arrangements.

Because our troupe was not affiliated with a student organization we were at a significant disadvantage when making other preparations. Unlike registered student theatre troupes who have a reliable source of rehearsal rooms, costumes, properties, and all manner of other resources required for a full theatrical production, we were a group of individual students and community members, led by a student and working with the support of mainly academic departments. Although props and costumes for the performance week were not terribly urgent in the pre-production process, we were very soon desperately in need of rehearsal locations. I began reaching out to community centers and churches around Newark where I thought groups might meet and offered their members an opportunity to freely observe any of our rehearsals and performances in exchange for providing us space to rehearse several nights a week. Ultimately, the Newark United Methodist Church and the Newark Senior Center, a recreational community for seniors about five minutes away from campus, both agreed to provide minimal arrangements without any fees.

Scheduling in this pre-production phase was the main thing that prevented us from fully utilizing the spaces offered us by the church and the senior center. Considering that I was selecting my actors personally, and not giving auditions, I had

to respect their established schedules as well as my own. Therefore the schedules for both rehearsals and performances were largely unplanned prior to the first rehearsal. I was prepared for this when casting the project, and during all of my individual contacts prior to casting I assured everyone that scheduling would be flexible and possibly changed on a week-to-week basis if necessary. That said rehearsal locations often had to be provided at the last minute, which the senior center and the church were often unable to accommodate.

That said we did find a last-minute way to find rehearsal spaces when neither the church nor the senior center were available. The English Department at UD is generally able to arrange “meeting rooms” for students outside of class time. Since we were working under the umbrella of the English Department, we were allowed the opportunity to use this arrangement for a “study of Shakespearean performance.” We were given the opportunity to use classrooms on the UD campus, even at the last minute, although we were almost always in a different one. It wasn’t until this option became clear that I began to finalize schedules for both rehearsals and performances. The initial plan was to rehearse anywhere from three to five nights a week, and perform once or twice every day for the seven-day period from Saturday, March 22<sup>nd</sup> through Friday March 28<sup>th</sup>. But like all best laid plans, they would have a tendency to go astray.

### **Rehearsals**

During the entire rehearsal process, every time someone from outside the project expressed interest in our methods they always asked one question: “If you’re designing an audience interactive show, how do you prepare without an audience?” This issue was admittedly one of our greatest challenges, trying to prepare to interact

with an audience that was not there, but I would be remiss to say that was our only or even our most formidable challenge. We only had about four weeks to rehearse the play, and we had only a few nights a week within that, so our rehearsal process was focused almost exclusively on the logistical elements of the play. Although this was merely our modified interpretation of the fast-paced schedule of Shakespeare's company, by any modern company standards it was no generous allotment of time. We had to carefully examine our priorities: we could manage the show without exploring the complex character motivations and relationships in rehearsal, but we could not manage it without answering some more concrete questions – how the scenes were going to be blocked or how the music would sound.

Early rehearsals progressed quickly, completing the blocking of a new scene of the play each night, largely working with smaller groups of three or four actors and rarely to never using the full cast. This work encompassed the first two weeks of rehearsal and we put off the use of any props, costumes, or musical instruments at this time. Very few actors had memorized their lines, so we focused mainly on sketching out the blocking for each scene. In a departure from typical modern rehearsal practices we did not review often or stop to develop characters or explore the text beyond the inevitable question or two. It was an anticipated difficulty for the actors, but I made myself available to them outside rehearsal whenever possible to try to make them more comfortable with the unorthodox practices. Several of us had very good discussions about characters outside of the schedule rehearsal time, especially Arielle (Miranda), Scott (Antonio) and Mary Jean (Sebastian). "Since you had less rehearsals you had to develop a blueprint of your character very early and present it at the first rehearsal," said Nigel Sanderson (Caliban) about this part of the process. "I had to

decide on the voice, the movement and feel for the character so when the first rehearsals came up I could present it to the director, so the necessary adjustments could be made early on.”

By week three we had fully blocked the show and we were ready to add more of the moving pieces, namely music. Our musical director, who was also the actor playing Antonio, worked tirelessly on assembling a collection of songs and a list of required instruments that would be easy for our cast to pick up without a great deal of rehearsal or training. That was one major difference between our cast and Shakespeare’s company, as we knew it would be – while Shakespeare’s company had a number of actors who were renowned for their musical prowess, we really only cast one actor (the young lady playing Ariel) for her musical ability, so we continued to rely on easy, pre-existing songs. “Because of the nature of the project and constraints that we had on time, I spent a lot of time looking through children’s song books and rote songs,” replied Bass about his musical work. “I would ask Angel what she was looking for and try to find a few options that fit it, but I was always looking for songs that would be in the public domain, easy to learn and easy to instrumentalize. One of them we even made up off the top of our heads – Caliban’s song for Scene 2.2, which we felt did not need any recognizable song structure.”

We presented a great many of these pieces to the cast during the third week of rehearsals, at the same time providing them with a selection of common musical instruments borrowed from the Resident Ensemble Players, including a small drum, two tambourines, a small rain stick, a harmonica and a set of crash cymbals. We also relied on a number of instruments that we purchased, including a set of percussion egg shakers, an Irish tin whistle, and a ukulele, Mr. Bass and myself learning to play the

latter two for several pieces in the show. The actors, too, had to learn how to play these instruments for various songs in the show, especially the inter-act rendition of the song “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life” of Monty Python fame. Around this time, we also choreographed a full-cast dance number for the wedding masque in Act 4, Scene 1.

In the third week we also faced our final casting dilemma, which momentarily threatened to sink the project. Despite my consistent attempts to fill out the cast, by this point we still had not managed to find actors for Alonso and Gonzalo, the two remaining parts in the play. The play was already significantly double-cast, at least one person already had three characters on his plate, and the structure of the play made it almost impossible to find an Alonso or Gonzalo from the actors in our present company. We did find one possible lead in a friend of Scott Bass (Antonio), who had taken over a last-minute part in several theatre productions in the past. Mike Wyatt, a music teacher from West Deptford, New Jersey, agreed to come to a rehearsal and consider a part in the show.

However, even this lead did not get us any closer to casting two more members, so I made a last-minute executive decision that significantly changed the play: we decided to dissolve the character of Gonzalo. We distributed many of his lines throughout the play to other characters, cutting others that no longer fit. The majority of the lines were picked up by Alonso’s character, which was in the end performed by Mr. Wyatt. A number of other lines, especially in the playful banter between Adrian, Francisco, Gonzalo, Antonio and Sebastian in Scene 2.1, were adopted by Adrian and Francisco, whose characters were ultimately doubled by Arielle Klein (Miranda) and Rebecca Deegan (Trinculo). Luckily, since we had

blocked the play without an Alonso or Gonzalo, we did not have to make too many adjustments with this new casting decision. In fact Mr. Wyatt, who teaches music at St. Monica's School in Philadelphia, brought to the play a number of talents that came in exceptionally useful in our final weeks, including his knowledge of instruments. By the time of performances, he was playing three different instruments in the show, as well as singing and performing the part of Alonso with added lines. We felt our knowledge of the variability of Shakespeare's plays and company supported this decision, as ultimately this created a better production all around.

As we proceeded into the final week of rehearsals the ensemble finally became acquainted with one another. Prior to that we were working in mostly small groups, which was consistent with our understanding of Shakespeare's company and their rehearsal process. At this point in the process, though, we wanted to practice full run-throughs of the play as many times as possible, especially to ensure the play would reach its ideal timing of ninety minutes long. We used full props and costumes and ran the show once each night, although people struggled with memorization consistently and we repeatedly failed to reach our desired time. We even added an entire extra day of rehearsals to accommodate some last minute costumes that were added on the final rehearsal day.

Yet still I have left unanswered the persistent question of how we prepared for an audience interactive show without an audience. For the early rehearsals this was most difficult, as the rehearsal groups were small and in many cases the cast were not even free to observe each other as audience members. But as we blocked our scenes, I encouraged the actors to communicate their lines to the audience whenever possible. Although this was not always "interactive" per se it reminded us to keep the audience



involved at all times and to shatter the “fourth wall” as often as possible. We also kept our eyes open for specific moments to physically involve the audience, even without them physically there. These moments were hardest to find in the first two scenes of the play, with the mariners aboard their sinking ship and Miranda and Prospero giving us exposition on the island, but were plentiful throughout the rest of the play.

A few actors were exceptionally comfortable finding places to physically involve the audience, often involving ad-libbing. We developed a series of actions during Scene 2.1 to get the audience physically and emotionally engaged, including a small dance to get the audience clapping, and a chant encouraged by Bass shouting, “Let Sebastian wake! Let Sebastian wake!” (“allying” the audience on his plot to make his friend Sebastian the future king). He also physically engaged the audience during this scene by kissing one audience member’s hand and high-fiving another. We used small moments like this as the example whenever possible, relying on my presence as a director and the presence of their fellow actors to fill in the “audience participation” to a reasonable extent. We also relied heavily on the actress playing Ariel, Claire Davanzo, to interact with the audience whenever possible, as her blocking gave her much more freedom to roam the audience than the rest of the company.

It was not easy for all of the actors, though, to constantly keep in mind their potential live audiences. Some company members, like the one playing Prospero, initially found it very difficult to find moments in their text to reach out to the audience, although we did later find several moments in the final scene to do so. Other actors, even when their text encouraged interaction with the audience, found it difficult to do so because of the acting techniques to which they were accustomed. Nigel Sanderson (Caliban) spoke to this, stating, “At first I was off put by the idea of

audience interaction...I thought the increased audience interaction would decrease my performance. But...it was so cool to involve the audience so much and to deliver a line into a person's eyes was awesome. I find myself looking back and wishing I did more." Especially for these actors who were having trouble with the concept, we reserved some energy for making additional interactive choices during performance. We knew that a live audience would change things considerably and we knew that those moments would arise and surprise us by giving us the opportunities to interact.

### **Preparing for Performances**

To acquire the necessary props and costumes for performances we had to substantially rely on the generosity of other theatres. The props department of the Resident Ensemble Players at UD allowed us to borrow all of the musical instruments we needed plus almost all of the remaining hand props at no charge, partially because of my prior good relationship with them. E-52 Student Theatre as well helped provide us with a larger piece (a table) and several other hand props. For costumes, which are of great importance in this particular play, we made two trips to the Wilmington Drama League, a community theatre that provided us with a wide array of possible costumes from which everybody in the cast managed to find something suitable. For some characters for whom it would be suitable, the actors opted to provide their own costumes. This included Miranda and all of the mariners, for whom we did not think period dress would be necessary. For the other characters we did not give as much thought to "period" as "illusion." *The Tempest* is centered around a Neapolitan king and his court, and we needed clothing that would symbolize and help broadcast that message, and emphasize the contrast between the social standing of King Alonso and his family and Prospero and the island inhabitants.

Over the course of the four weeks of rehearsals, we discovered that our cast's schedules were not as amenable as we thought to our previously planned week of performances. Instead of being available for seven performance days from Saturday, March 22nd through Friday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, instead, our available days were shortened to Sunday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> through Thursday, March 27<sup>th</sup>. We were restricted by our performers' availabilities and the UD campus schedule, as the spring recess began on the evening of March 28<sup>th</sup> and that evening would see a large exodus of students leaving the campus. We were somewhat limited in available spaces since normally performance spaces are booked much further in advance than one month, so we adjusted many of our desired performance times and locations. We successfully found a traditional theatre space (Gore Recital Hall), a residential dining hall, two public food courts and a lecture hall, all of which were provided by the university for reasonable fees. However, we failed to book several venues where we had hoped to perform, including the Newark United Methodist Church, any of the popular bars/restaurants on Main Street in Newark, or any of the residence hall lounges. To compensate for some of these lost performances we finally scheduled six total performances, with double performances on Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> and Tuesday the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Once the performances were confirmed we publicized the performances with posters and fliers that we distributed all over campus. I personally invited professors and classes to attend, and we had announcements go out through both the UD Honors Program and the Undergraduate Research Program. I even submitted a request to the campus newspaper *The Review*, who wrote a story about my research and the upcoming performance that appeared in that week's edition. We began to amass a wide array of positive responses from people and we began to feel confident that we

would, no matter what, at least have a small audience to rely on for our experiment. How we would adapt to those audiences, though, and the extent to which they would affect our performance as we hoped they would, would not become clear until we officially began. The experiment had been carefully and exhaustively prepared. The test could be run.

## **Chapter 4**

### **PERFORMANCES**

For the typical director of a modern theatrical production performances are tests in consistency. From the first dress rehearsal to the closing night, directors take mental and sometimes written notes about how much a performance has varied from its “ideal” version. These notes generally refer to specific techniques or pieces of stage action that have been forgotten, added erroneously, lasted too long (or not long enough), or succumbed to other minor variations that stand between that evening’s version of the play and the “ideal” one the director has been working toward. Where this rigid consistency is the goal, variation and spontaneity are the enemies, and there is great pressure on the actors to prepare the plays as if they are dance routines. Technical and dress rehearsals are thus about eliminating all the question marks, and once performances have begun, the play is running smoothly and all pieces are committed to memory. The pressure is lifted, and actors favor a predictable rhythm over any sort of generative variation.

Our clandestine company, however, favored a sort of organized chaos in our acting style. I have discussed how the combined effect of the early modern expedited rehearsal schedule and the heavy influence that live, involved audiences could make, it was not only expected that Shakespearean performances would vary from night to night, it was a necessary step in developing the play. Although we knew our audience would not be as prepared to react freely and involve themselves in the action, we rehearsed in such a way as to encourage our audiences to behave unpredictably, and

allow for the maximum variation in the performances. This was a crucial, yet challenging realization for our company as we headed into the main experiment in late March. We had a bit of a “chicken or the egg” dilemma to face; in the early modern theatre, active, energetic, involved audiences allowed Shakespearean performances to vary so heavily from day to day. This happened naturally without having to force any kind of lively reactions from the audience, and it was the audience that necessitated the performers’ flexibility, not the other way around. We, however, had to face the opposite problem. Our company had to vary the performances first, knowing full well that if we wanted the audience to behave more naturally and interactively we would have to force them to do so, and only then could we create the desired “give-and-take” effect in our performance.

Our company set into performance week feeling a little unsteady on our feet. We knew two things: 1) that we were feeling slightly unprepared for performance, and 2) that after having spent several weeks trying to understand how to do the play one way that we would be forced to turn around and change it night after night as we interacted with different audiences and stage spaces. I had expected both of these things from day one of the process, but what I did not expect was how severely this lack of certainty would affect everyone’s confidence going into day one. The actors felt the stress of nervousness, several people not feeling entirely comfortable with their lines, and even more not feeling ready to jump onto an entirely new stage space for the first time. As an ensemble troupe, though, they had to work very hard to support each other and help one another steel themselves for the trial ahead; “You freak out before the first performance because you feel like you did not have enough rehearsals,” said

Nigel Sanderson (Caliban) about his experience during this uncertain time. “But then you remember, that’s what you signed up for.”

While the actors worried about whether they would remember their lines and how they would adjust their blocking, I concerned myself with how we were going to attract the attention and good-will of audiences in these highly public venues. I had several hundred brightly colored handbills created in place of traditional programs, which many theatregoers know have a tendency to pull the focus of bored audience members. I also had large color posters printed to display near or just outside our stage spaces. These materials were chiefly meant to attract passersby, the average, non-Shakespeare oriented college students whom I had especially hoped to reach with our performances.

I was not only concerned – in this pre-performance time – with attracting audiences but also with assessing their reactions to the play itself. With the actors striving for organized chaos and likely to each have ten different accounts of each performance afterwards, I wanted to gauge the reactions of the audiences straight from their own mouths. I especially hoped to ascertain whether they a) understood the play despite the less formal approach, b) understood the “interactive” goal and participated with it, and c) ultimately enjoyed the performance style. I printed brief feedback forms with a few short questions, along with their written permission to be contacted for further feedback. The forms asked five main questions: 1. “Have you ever seen a Shakespeare play before?” (Yes or No) 2. “Have you ever seen *THE TEMPEST* before?” (Yes or No) 3. “How did this production differ from other productions you have seen?” 4. “Did you interact with the performers? How? Why or why not?” 5. “What was your favorite part of the performance?”

While I also observed each performance from the audience, I also wanted to keep myself available backstage for the actors for several reasons. On the one hand, I wanted to observe the play from all angles and observe how the actors were conducting themselves as the play progressed. I also had a responsibility to help the actors during the play, including playing an instrument for several songs and aiding in several quick costume changes. I opted to move freely around each space, as I was in the unique position to give much-needed advice throughout the play as to what adjustments needed to be made for that particular space. In many cases these suggestions had to do with the volume of the performance, but this sometimes included (especially during later performances) on-the-spot changes to the play itself, or changes to the movement of props or costumes based on the different venues. One actor particularly valued this continued insight into performances; Scott Bass (Antonio) said afterwards “Each venue and environment called for something different, and it was incredibly helpful to know what was lacking and what went well and so on.”

### **Sunday, March 23rd 2014**

Our first two performances took place in our second-busiest venue of the week. We had a small 12 x 8 platform stage (usually used for stationary musical guests or stages at the front of ceremony rooms) in the middle of a university food court inside the Trabant Student Center. On an average weekday this student center sees thousands of students passing through, many of whom sit in groups at tables to study, socialize, or eat from one of the restaurants in the building. On a Sunday afternoon, though, the building was much less densely populated than usual. Although we had hoped to provide entertainment for all of those present – even those not there for the



performance itself – we ended up being directly accessible to only about three to four tables, along with around a dozen chairs which we carefully placed in order to have an audience directly facing us. Even these audience members were separated from the platform stage by at least twelve feet of walking space, creating a large gap that would normally have served as walking path for passersby, especially during a performance of ambient music or any other non-interactive art form.

The physical space of this building had its own unique advantages. The stage was placed against a wall consisting of mainly glass windows, allowing full daylight to illuminate the stage, as it would have in the old Globe. Also, the extra-stage space, including the twelve or so feet in front, became supplemental acting space and an especially valuable one being that it was on the same vertical plane as the audience, making it easier for actors to reach out to them and involve them in the action. There was the distinct possibility, in the beginning, that this space would become highly obstructive, allowing disinterested person to walk in front of the stage and disturb the action. Yet in a surprising development, even those passersby who were not interested in what was happening on the stage were aware of the performance, choosing respectfully to walk a longer route around the audience rather than disturb the play. When they did not do so, which happened several times during the second performance, it provided the actors with the comedic opportunity of talking directly to those passing by; during that performance, one actor even shouted “Stop walking through our play!” which elicited a large laugh from the audience and other cast members.

## Performance #1

Our first performance was at 3:30 p.m., and was highly akin to a modern preview performance. The play ran approximately ten minutes over its ninety-minute goal runtime, bits of action were rough, and the actors' voices were not quite loud enough to compensate for the noisy space. The bustling crowd and the extraordinarily high ceilings were not the most acoustically friendly qualities, and quite a challenge for a theatrical performance. The actors could be described as getting their sea legs, after comfortably rehearsing for so long in private, enclosed lecture halls and classrooms – that had especially good acoustics in many cases – without a live audience. The most audience-interactive actors were those who came into the production already comfortable with that style of acting from other productions, or those who had specifically planned moments of audience interaction (especially those playing Ariel and Antonio). Other actors, including those playing Miranda, Prospero, and Ferdinand, had difficulty reaching out during this first performance. They especially had trouble with such an open, non-traditional seating arrangement. Having not practiced for a full three-quarter round stage, it presented a challenge when two very attentive ladies watched the whole play from a table just behind the actors' shoulders, and the actors were certainly struggling to reach out to those people.

Despite this initial shakiness, the message of the production came across loud and clear. According to feedback provided by audience members after the show, more than half of the thirteen respondents (seventeen to be exact) explicitly spoke positively about what they called “the interactive element” or “the audience participation.” Two respondents even listed this as their favorite part of the performance. Only one respondent, who declined to be contacted further, expressed disinterest in the interactive performance, while another, who gave mostly positive feedback for the

other questions, remarked that they did not interact with the performers because they felt “too shy.” Six respondents showed an appreciation for the comedy in the play, especially the scenes with the drunken butler Stephano and his compatriots, Trinculo and Caliban, and four explicitly mentioned the music and Ariel as a favorite or notable part of the performance. All of the feedback was made available to the actors, which they used to prepare for subsequent performances, especially the numerous replies about the actors’ speaking volume, which was apparently not sufficient at this performance for all of the audience members to hear.

Two audience members stood out from this particular batch of feedback, and they clearly connected with our overall purpose. Christopher Todd Waters, a Shakespeare and theatre enthusiast who has himself starred in several student productions of Shakespeare, remarked that, “This production had so much life, and was so animated. I would long to see all of Shakespeare’s plays performed this way!” Another audience member, who declined to give their name and contact information, remarked that they “felt the presence of the actors around me” and said the “interactive” nature of the performance “drew me in more.” These two comments went beyond our expectations of the feedback we would receive, and proved that even when we were unsteady on our feet more than one audience member still appreciated our mission to add new value to the genre of Shakespeare.

## Performance #2

The second performance took place at 6:30 p.m., about eighty minutes after the conclusion of the first performance. Although not many physical or emotional attributes of the play were adjusted for this performance, it was clearly changed from the premiere several hours before. After one performance on the same stage the actors

were markedly more confident, audible, fluid, and interactive. A memorable example took place during one highly interactive scene where Antonio and Sebastian plot to murder the king while the rest of the company is asleep. During their exchange, Antonio always reached out to the audience several times, trying to invoke cheers of support at his line “Look how well my garments sit upon me” (2.1.274). In this particular performance, though, one audience member who clearly knew the story of the play instigated a series of jeers and booing, and refused to return a high-five. Antonio continued his encouragements, but the booing continued until he finally grabbed one of their hands and forced them to give him a high-five, eliciting a round of laughter and applause before he returned to the scene.

At every performance, even those who were hesitant to interact with the performers during the slower first half of the play loosened up and became more energetic and involved when we performed our inter-act song, “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life.” The song’s whistling, dancing, and repetitive lyrics provoked singing, clapping and whistling every night. On this Sunday night in particular, though, the inter-act song was a major crowd favorite. Almost half of the spectators who gave feedback – five out of eleven, to be exact – named the song as their favorite part of the performance, while at least three more admitted they tried to sing, clap, or whistle along with the song.

### **Monday, March 24th 2014**

#### **Performance #3**

The company had an unusually long amount of downtime before the third performance on Monday night at 8 p.m. Our second venue was a slightly elevated

stage in “the Scrounge,” in the Perkins Student Center, on the east side of the UD campus. This space was also technically a “food court,” but the environment was completely different from that of the Trabant Center. The stage was more than twice as deep, which despite expectations was actually more hindrance than help. The actors had to constantly remind themselves (and each other) to play on the furthest possible downstage area, and they continued to use the extra-stage space to close the gap between the actors and the audience. The room was a much more intimate space, with comfortable couches and lounge chairs giving it more of a coffee shop vibe than the previous night. Because the room was more enclosed, we had significantly fewer passersby, although a number of people did stop outside the open doorways and ask offstage actors what was happening. This plus the late hour of performance on an early weeknight made for a small crowd, but we were pleased to find them surprisingly enthusiastic.

The performance itself was more consistent and static than was expected for the third performance. The intermission song and the group masque scene were, as usual, effective in involving the audience, but there were few changes to the action itself. The physical spacing of the performance, though, was very different; as the play progressed and the actors grappled with the distance between them and their audience, they began to opt increasingly for the extra-stage space just below the platform, putting them face-to-face with their audience. One of our actresses, Arielle Klein (Miranda), stated this environment was her favorite, stating “The stage forced us to get down off the stage and closer to the audience, which made it easier to take lines out to them.” Even in the large group-dancing scene, which necessitated the entire cast and several audience members dancing in a circle, the actors opted for the more cramped

extra-stage space rather than going the full distance up to the platform. This exemplified how flexible the actors were becoming with the staging and how willing they were to adjust or even completely reinvent their blocking to suit this new space.

One notable guest at this performance was the chair of the English Department at UD, Dr. John Ernest, who thoroughly enjoyed the production and thought it was a great way to bring studies of English and Shakespeare to life for modern students. Sixteen other people also gave feedback at the end of the play, and seven of them gave positive responses regarding the audience interactivity. While we had a few more dissenters at this performance (two people did not enjoy the interactive element and far fewer people reported singing or dancing along when prompted), we still received a number of unique positive comments. One respondent found there was “lots of spirit” in our production, while another thought “the songs and masque were very well done.” And because the space was more intimate, people seemed to connect with more of a variety of characters – Prospero, Ariel, Stephano, Trinculo, and Ferdinand all received special attention in viewers’ comments at the end of the night.

## **Tuesday, March 25th 2014**

### **Performance #4**

On the Tuesday following the first three performances, the performance venue changed in a startling way – twice. At 3:30 p.m., we held our special performance that was not generally publicized; instead, it was advertised as “invite-only” to honors students, undergraduate thesis students, professors, and theatrical colleagues, including the current President of the Wilmington Drama League. This performance was in a much larger, more familiar room – a large, 370-seat lecture auditorium in the

academic center of campus. Given the room's intended use it was much more acoustically friendly and very well lit and comfortable for the audience. These aspects of the space, however, allowed for more of the predictable rhythm mentioned earlier to creep into the performances of the actors. That, plus the scholarly, academic audience – who acted a bit less raucous and a bit more politely observant – made for a more toned-down afternoon and a slightly longer play.

This inadvertent adjustment to the pace, though, led to a beneficial and purposeful adjustment to our methods. Since we had another performance an hour after the end of the play, we started making cuts and adjustments to songs and speeches in the middle of the performance. I used my freedom in the space to confer frequently with actors and ask them to take certain speeches or moments faster. The actress playing Ariel and I even agreed to cut two of the smaller songs late in the play in a last-ditch attempt to cut some time off. Though we still exceeded the desired ninety minutes, the actors started feeling more comfortable making spontaneous adjustments or cuts to the play, which as we know is a not altogether UN-Shakespearean practice.

Based on the feedback we received, the quietness of the audience did not hinder their appreciation of the performance. In fact much of the feedback from this performance was our most enthusiastic yet. Ten of the fifteen respondents had a positive response to the audience interaction, five of which claimed it was their favorite part of the performance. One specifically noted there were “unending efforts to directly engage [the] audience.” Another student remarked, “It was exciting! So fun to watch and be a part of!” We also received some more ambivalent comments that were equally if not more useful in preparing for the coming performances. One

spectator, when asked if they interacted with performers, “It was strange at first but I became accustomed to it,” while another responded that they “wanted to contribute without feeling embarrassed or distracting from the performance.” I later used these comments to encourage the actors to pay closer attention to their audience, and specifically to keep their eyes peeled for audience members who might be willing to be responsive and allow them an opportunity to do so.

#### Performance #5

The mood of the ensemble was frantic for the entire three hours from the end of the fourth performance to the end of the fifth. The next performance was to take place in a loud, bustling cafeteria in the Pencader Dining Hall on the northernmost part of the UD campus, which meant a fast and stressful commute of all of our personnel and wares. We did a walkthrough of the cafeteria a week prior to let the manager know how much space we needed, and at that time the room was more or less humming, a dull roar. On this Tuesday night at 6:00 p.m., though, the chaos was much more prevalent off the stage than on. At first blush, it looked like it was going to be a terrible mistake trying to perform even a ninety-minute Shakespeare play for this dining room of socializing, inattentive students, and some might argue it was. But within a few scenes it became clear that this performance was a game-changer, one that would allow us to create a play that was completely different from anything we had done before, and we would carry it with us into the final performance the next day.

In the dining hall we did not have a room of polite viewers. Most of the audience came and went as they went through their dinner, and perhaps only two or three people came with the intention of watching the entire play. It was loud, and even our loudest moments could not pull the room volume down enough for more than one



table of diners to hear us. The actors had to double or triple their vocal volume, basically shouting their lines into a void, and we very quickly realized that our play would have to turn into a series of entertaining and attention-grabbing moments, not a story but a series of body movements and outrageous gimmicks. We started making a lot of adjustments in the middle of the play – cutting half the text of some scenes including the love scene between Miranda and Ferdinand, the last two Ariel songs, and even the re-entrance of the Boatswain in the final scene.

We needed the play to move at a clip, and to get to the exciting and highly entertaining portions as quickly as possible. Arielle Klein (Miranda) and Megan Julian (Ferdinand), whose love scenes in the play were normally quiet and very tame, wisely intuited that there they could rely on – if nothing else – the college student fascination with two females kissing to liven up their scenes. While every other night they kissed for a few seconds at most, that night they made their girl-on-girl kiss the main feature of their scene, and they asked the entire rest of the cast to react lewdly in order to momentarily grab the attention of the diners. “Megan and I relied on our body language to convey the scene because the environment was just too loud.” Ms. Klein said. “We said a few lines, hugged and then skipped right to the kiss...which was one of the only ways to get that audience involved.”

The rest of the cast, too, began to feel free to experiment and improvise jokes. When Scott Bass, the actor playing Iris in the wedding masque scene, did not get as much attention as he normally did with his outrageous goddess mask and dress, he caused an uproar of laughter by shouting “Hey! Shut up! I’m a goddess!” Jason Hewett (Stephano) was likewise outrageous and shouted a number of things to the audience to get their attention, while Trinculo spent half the play visiting the diners’

tables, eating their food and telling them to watch. “At that moment, fighting for the barest scrap of audience attention, the show became a real living breathing entity,” said Mr. Bass, who actually stated this performance location was his favorite. He described the fast-paced trial-and-error nature of the performance with excitement: “‘Give ‘em this! Did that work? Sing ‘em a song! Still nothing? Directly insult them!’ It was far and away our most difficult show and coincidentally, perhaps our most fun.”

As we finished the show within our ninety-minute goal, ending just in time for the dining hall to stop serving for the evening, we did not hand out feedback forms to the audience members. However, one person, Becky Marshall (a friend of Mary Jean Rainsford, our Sebastian), stayed for the duration of the performance, and thoroughly enjoyed it, despite the disorganized chaos of the evening. “The actors were very committed to the unique performance, which made it very fun to watch as they were making up for the lack of audience engagement with their plentiful enthusiasm,” said Becky when asked what she enjoyed about the performance. About the unusual setting, she remarked, “The fact that it was in a public setting made it almost less of a ‘performance’ and more of a vignette, where it sometimes felt the actors were acting less to the room, and more to specific audience members, or to themselves.”

In a surprising twist, we found some of our most engaged and interactive audience members ever in two members of the dining hall staff, both of whom appeared to have a mild cognitive or social impairment. It was clear that these two enjoyed and understood the play and they had a lack of inhibitions about interacting with the performers; one of them even had a back-and-forth dialogue with Nick Johnson (Prospero) *in the middle of final scene*. We did not get this level of direct contact with audience members at any other venue, and it gave me a magnificent and

surprising revelation. The modern, reverent Shakespeare in fancy theatres on closed-off stages is usually geared to the highly educated, and rarely shown to crowds of children or persons with special needs. However this type of Shakespeare, alive and engaging, funny and spontaneous, is well suited to these groups. Their innocence and their inherent joy at being entertained make them the perfect crowd for this type of show. They will not sit politely and clap when they're supposed to clap. They will scream, shout, laugh, and respond to the actors – irreverently and sometimes inappropriately – and they will challenge the performers and become a part of the show themselves. And that is exactly what Shakespeare's audience would have done.

### **Wednesday, March 26th 2014**

#### **Final Performance #6**

Originally, the “traditional theatre” venue we wanted to use at some point during our performance run was meant to be our experimental control. We opted for a very formal theatre space: the Gore Recital Hall at the Roselle Center for Fine Arts. When the actors first arrived at the theatre, they were in awe of the luxuries and beauty of the space – waxed floors, a dressing room, and the fantastic acoustics deserving of a recital hall. Their delight prompted me to remind them that this was not the type of play that usually benefited from a stage like this and I warned them that they would have to work extra hard to fight against the comfort of the theatre and connect with the audience. Despite the audience's plush, comfortable seating, the actors had to refuse to let the pace of the action drop, even though they no longer had to shout to be heard. Perhaps overly pessimistically I fully expected that we would return to our “predictable rhythm” of several nights before, but I could not have been more wrong.

After several days of making adjustments on the fly, moving from location to location, shouting over crowds of eaters or playing to quiet polite scholars, the cast had finally put together all of the pieces to make an amazing, engaging, spontaneous, interactive show. Rather than belaboring the energy, the acoustics of the theatre allowed the actors to relax their voices and experiment more with their bodies and their jokes. They found dozens of reasons to leave the stage space and act essentially in the laps of those in the front row. In one scene, Mike Wyatt (Alonso) while pretending to be asleep actually rolled off the stage causing a new eruption of laughter for the audience. They used the first half of the show to directly communicate with the audience as much as possible, which meant by the second act the audience was responding to questions we had never intended to ask them. Perhaps as a result of the more intimate theatre space, the awareness of the audience was at an all-time high: Arielle Klein (Miranda) said, “During 2.1, as Adrian, if I noticed some audience members zoning out a bit, I would just walk over to them and ask them, not Alonso, if ‘my garments looked fresh.’”

The energy of the performers reached fantastic levels. The actors improvised left and right, substantially speeding up some of the longer scenes in the play, especially the final scene. The constant “riffing” did slow down some of the middle scenes, including those with the drunken Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban, causing the play to go fifteen minutes over our desired ninety minutes. But the audience was in such good spirits that their attention did not waver, despite the length. They were especially good-natured in the highly interactive intermission and group-dancing scene during the wedding masque. One actor even decided for the first time to play a guessing game with the audience at intermission, before performing “Always Look on

the Bright Side of Life”, called “Shakespeare or Batman?” He kept all of the energy as he walked them through the surprising game: “I’ll read a quote, and you’ll cheer if you think Batman said it or if you think Shakespeare said it,” he introduced. “If you do well, you’ll be rewarded with an audience interactive sing-a-long. If you do poorly, you’ll be punished...with an audience interactive sing-a-long.” The crowd ate it up – one person even cited this game as their favorite part of the performance.

We had a huge influx of positive comments after this performance, especially with regard to the interactive elements of the show. A number of respondents appreciated the differences between this and other Shakespeare plays they had seen; “[It was] much more casual and engaging than traditional shows” said one respondent. Another enthusiastically reported: “I could say my comments out loud without feeling like I was interrupting...it was a blast!” One audience member, who was one of those brought on stage to dance with the actors, said that his favorite part of the performance was “Ad-libbing. I liked that the actors made it their own.” And at least four audience members remarked on the enthusiasm of the actors, specifically answering that they interacted because the actors encouraged them or provoked them to and made them feel comfortable with their “friendly and fun” interactions.

### **Conclusion**

Having so many varied performance venues in such a limited time ended up serving dual purposes. While we had always aimed to have a “touring” performance to simulate the traveling performances of Shakespeare’s company, the actors were forced to remain flexible and spontaneous, knowing that they would (almost) never perform on the same stage twice. If we had been performing on one stage for five days straight, they never would have made as many adjustments or kept the play as lively and fresh

as they did. Although Shakespeare's company did not move around nearly as much or as fast as we did, we assume they must have had the same spontaneous and generative quality to each of their performances, and we merely found a different way to replicate that. "I liked the constant adapting," said Nigel Sanderson (Caliban) after the performances. "As an actor you always want to challenge yourself. That kind of stuff keeps you on your toes."

With a theatrical experiment like this one there is no easy way to define success. There is no "null hypothesis" we are trying to disprove; there are a number of ways we could measure our success, and the varied responses of the audience each night proved that at every performance some particular elements of the play shone brightest according to the personality of each unique audience. But the overwhelming prevalence of positive feedback led us to some highly satisfactory reflections on our performance. In the small picture, we made it through an unpredictable and chaotic week of performances, and we found at least one person who appreciated us each night. In the bigger picture, though, of what this means for the future of Shakespearean performance and studies of original staging, will be the focus of my reflections in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5

### REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It is widely supported by all believers in the scientific method that the purpose of an experiment is not to prove anything is true. The purpose of an experiment is, rather, to prove that an idea is *not false*. It takes anywhere from hundreds to thousands of scientific experiments before an established scientific theory can be defined, and even then an established scientific theory like the theory of gravity are merely held as a “widely-accepted truth,” and it remains open to dismissal if enough experiments suggest those truths to be false. The series of experiments that were used to establish the theory of gravity have never proved that there is a physical entity called “gravity” that undoubtedly exists. What they did do, however, was prove time and time again that the suggested physical phenomena we observe in the natural world could be explained by a unified theory of gravity, thus the scientists’ conclusions about this natural force were *not false*.

Therefore the success of an experiment is measured by the foundation it creates for future work to support (*not prove*) by replicating their findings. A theatrical experiment, unusual though it may be, cannot be an exception to this process. All original practice companies are experimenters of sorts, finding out if original staging has potential as a new technique for performing Shakespeare and if the discoveries of one company can inform and improve the techniques of another company. By that logic, no one company can *prove* that original practices are the definitive best way to perform Shakespeare in any locale for any audience. However, what our company

hopes to provide with our results is further evidence to support original practices as both valid and exciting. To go a little further, we put forth the idea that original staging is perhaps one of the most effective ways to reach modern theatrical audiences, demographics of people who these days have higher expectations, shorter attention spans, and far less experience with the idealized, “classical” Shakespeare with which many modern Shakespeare scholars were raised.

When producing Shakespeare, especially for a young American audience, there is always the concern about making it “understandable.” Providing opportunities for audience to give feedback on a performance is always likely to turn up at least a few responses of “I did not get it” from some of the patrons. However, as stated at length in the previous chapters, we received a huge amount of positive feedback from audience members about our original practice attempts. Our company did not receive a single comment about the play being too hard to understand, even though we did not pay such rigid attention to the details of the story as other productions. Instead, we shifted the focus to delight and enjoyment in the storytelling itself. The fast pace, universal lighting, music, dancing, games, interactivity, and all other techniques traditionally associated with original practice are engaging and enjoyable, and almost every patron had a comment about one or more of the listed attributes in our show. We feel confident that no one left our production wondering, “What was the point of that?” They understood the vital differences between our performance and other Shakespearean performances they had seen, and in many cases the adaptations caught the audience members by pleasant surprise.

In this particular experiment we have a unique opportunity to study the effect of these practices on the actors, not just the audience, and it is perhaps more effective



to draw conclusions by studying the former of these two groups. Our trial-by-fire performance schedule brought us to a different location every night, and left us with only short ninety-minute windows to connect with the audience's thoughts. However, the impact on the actors over the course of the month-long preparation left a much more lasting impression, and these impacts revealed a lot of positive reactions about being a member of an original staging company. Of the ten actors in the production six filled out surveys about their experiences, and every single one of those six described their experiences in performing this way as a positive one.

Some, like Nick Johnson (Prospero) stated that the experience "confirmed" their previous beliefs about Shakespeare plays being more active than they are commonly treated. Others, including Arielle Klein (Miranda) and Nigel Sanderson (Caliban), came into the production with much less prior Shakespeare experience, and they described the experience as enlightening. Some, after experiencing how effective it could be to communicate directly with an audience, even expressed a desire to use the same audience-centric performance techniques in other plays. In a perfect example of the overall feel, Mary Jean Rainsford (Sebastian) stated, "If audiences are willing to let go and participate, it becomes a less passive and more immersive experience than most of today's staging."

There are a few significant implications we can draw from our work, the first of which brings us back to the traditional purpose of scientific experiments. The success we can surmise from both our positive actor and audience feedback is further support for the original staging movement in general. Many of our spectators were not traditional theatre-goers or Shakespearean scholars, but they still noticed the unique qualities of the performance and enjoyed them, which backs up the findings of the half

dozen or so original practice companies in the US and Britain: that this type of performance is appealing for a modern crowd and worth continued exploration. With our particular experiment we could not definitively back up any suggestion that original practices Shakespeare can be profitable, since our free performances did not provide optimum testing for that particular theory. Profitability is something that professional staging companies could speak to this better than us.

On the other hand we did provide support for the idea that original staging is not bound by any particular constraints, including finances. In an earlier chapter, I outlined many of the priorities of original practice companies, not least of which included a professional acting company with a high level of musical ability and full-scale replicas of early modern playhouses. By our production, though, we proved that there is more freedom in the original practices movement than perhaps anyone thought before. Our company created a successful production on what was essentially a shoestring budget, no more than \$1,200, bringing together multiple theatre companies and other community organizations to cooperate and support the remainder of the requirements. Our actors were students or community members all participating on a voluntary unpaid basis with no formal training in classical Shakespearean acting or as professional musicians. We also managed to receive consistent positive feedback without a predictable subscribing audience or, more importantly, without any kind of early modern playhouse replica. We used largely informal theatre spaces and we were always able to adapt the same blocking accordingly. These elements combined suggest that smaller, less-funded companies may have more and more opportunities to enter the original practices movement. We could expect to see dozens more original practice productions (if not, devoted companies) over the next few years, as long as

productions like ours continue to gain even a small amount of traction without much more than a few devoted actors and an idea.

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